



NEWS RELEASE

MAYOR COLEEN J. SENG

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MAYOR RELEASES REPORT OF GROUP HOMES TASK FORCE

Mayor Coleen J. Seng today released the Group Homes Task Force report, which examined the City's laws and regulations governing group homes and congregate housing. The Mayor has reviewed the recommendations and directed City staff to draft potential changes to City ordinances.

"I want to thank the task force, which had a very open process with many meetings that included hearing from the public and providers," said Mayor Seng. "There are many types of group homes in our community. The consensus is that our existing local regulations generally work well to provide services to special needs citizens and to protect neighborhoods. One element that is missing is a 'reasonable accommodation' process to give those operating group homes and clients a procedure to request a waiver of certain regulations. These waiver requests would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the City Council."

The task force recommended that the City retain its current system for classifying family dwellings, group homes and health care facilities and its spacing requirements for group homes.

Mayor Seng said the City's role in regulating group homes is limited to land-use controls enacted through the zoning ordinance. The State of Nebraska is the primary authority responsible for enforcing regulations and overseeing the operation of group home providers.

"Our report includes recommendations for improvement at the state level," said task force chair Jon Carlson, a member of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commission. "The bottom line is that with adequate service from the provider, special needs clients can be wonderful neighbors. With inadequate services, both the clients and the neighborhoods suffer."

Carlson said recommendations to the State cover issues the City is unable to regulate including:

- The State should develop a process to identify those individuals who are unable to be safely housed in the community and to provide them adequate housing opportunities.
- The State should take a more prominent role in the regulation and oversight of the day-to-day operations of these facilities, including monitoring performance, inspecting for compliance and responding to problems.
- The State should increase training requirements and quality to ensure that staff are trained appropriately for the needs of the clients.

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“The City is committed to working with State officials in their efforts to improve regulation and oversight practices,” said Mayor Seng. “The City needs to continue to collaborate with local providers and the State to monitor emerging issues.”

Also serving on the task force were:

- Jim Blue, Executive Director, Cedars Youth Services
- Kit Boesch, Administrator, Lincoln-Lancaster County Human Services Department
- Tom Casady, Lincoln Police Chief
- Jonathan Cook, Lincoln City Council
- Roger Massey, former area director for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and former Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commissioner
- Rick Peo, Chief Assistant City Attorney
- Larry Potratz, Executive Director, Lincoln Housing Authority
- Dean Settle, Executive Director, Lancaster County Community Mental Health Center
- Larry Williams, Director, Lincoln Commission on Human Rights
- Chuck Zimmerman, Plan Review Manager, City Building and Safety Department

The final task force report can be found on the City Web site at lincoln.ne.gov.